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CHAPTER XX.

Mr. Levison Seeks Information.
Levison neither smiled nor looked offended. "No," he said quietly. "I am just an ordinary business man; but my business is a peculiar one, and has a good many ramifications. On the present occasion I am desirous of obtaining some data in connection with the affairs of a client of mine, and I think you can help me."

Osborne nodded absently; it was difficult for him to drag his mind away from his great trouble—to concentrate it on his rather strange visitor.

"Your uncle, Mr. Osborne—by the way, I don't remember his name," "George Owen," said Osborne. "Ah, yes; of course," assented Mr. Levison, as if he now remembered them. He made a note of the names, for Mr. Levison was one of those men who rarely need to make notes. "He has spent some years in Algiers, has he not?"

"A great many," replied Osborne. "The occasion on which I happened to see you in Algiers with him was your first visit, was it not?"

"The first and only," said Osborne. "You remember Lord Herndale being there while you were in Algiers?"

"Oh, yes," said Osborne; "I remember him. A tall, handsome man, who seemed old to me—of course, I was only a boy then, and to a boy middle age looks like antiquity. Your business has to do with him, I see," he added, looking at Levison with, for the first time, some interest.

"Yes," said Levison. He regarded his cigar closely for a moment or two; then he said: "Mr. Osborne, I am in rather a delicate position. I am engaged on an inquiry which may or may not have serious results. If I were certain that these results would ensue, I should frankly lay my cards on the table before you; but I am not certain, and therefore I do not want to show my hand. In a word, I have certain suspicions which I consider to be well grounded, but they are suspicions only, and I do not want to confide them to any one, even to you, Mr. Osborne, whom I very much respect, and in whom, I tell you candidly, I should like to confide, for I think that you are directly or indirectly concerned in the matter."

Osborne was not the man to exclaim or start at anything at any time, and to-night he was so numbed by the shock he had already received in the loss of Eva to be impervious to any other.

"I am concerned," he said. "Yes," said Mr. Levison—he hesitated a moment—"through another person. Pardon me, please," he added quickly, as Osborne opened his lips to ask whom the other person was. "I can go no further than that at present, but I ask you to believe me when I say that if you refuse to assist me, you will very greatly regret it."

"That sounds like a threat, Mr. Levison," said Osborne, with a smile. "No; I'm not such a fool as to threaten Mr. Owen Osborne," said Levison very quietly. "I am only venturing to warn, to advise, you. Now, may I ask my questions?"

Osborne was silent for a moment or two, his strongly marked brows drawn, his eyes fixed keenly on the impassive face opposite. Then he nodded.

"Go ahead!" he said. "I think I

see your difficulty. I don't like moving in the dark, but I've had to do so before now."

"Thank you," said Levison. "You will find that your trust has not been misplaced, Mr. Osborne. Now, can you tell me whether Lord Herndale had visited Mr. George Osborne at Algiers before the occasion on which you saw him?"

Osborne thought for a moment, his chin in his hand, his eyes fixed on Levison.

"Yes, I can remember," he said. "I happen to have a good memory; it has been of some service to me in my wanderings. Lord Herndale had certainly been to Algiers before that I was present during several conversations between my uncle and him, and I remember now that Lord Herndale referred to a former visit or visits."

"He was alone when you and I saw him at Algiers?" said Mr. Levison. "I may as well say that I happened to be there on ordinary business quite unconnected with this one."

"Yes, he was alone. But I think if I remember rightly, that on one of his previous visits he had been accompanied by his wife, Lady Herndale."

Mr. Levison's eyelids dropped over his eyes, and he sipped his soda and whisky before putting his next question.

"That visit, when Lady Herndale was with him, was made many years before you and I met him?"

"Yes," replied Osborne reflectively. "I fancy, from the few words I remember, that it was soon after they were married."

Mr. Levison looked up at the ceiling as if he found its ornate carving and gilding extremely interesting; then he said:

"It struck me, Mr. Osborne, that Lord Herndale, when I chanced to meet him at your uncle's, looked like a man in trouble."

Osborne raised his eyes quickly and met Mr. Levison's. An incident had flashed across Osborne's mind—words which had sounded strangely to his boy's ears, and which, as they flashed upon him now, sounded still more pregnant, dramatic, in connection with the mysterious business in which he and this strange-looking man were dealing.

"Yes," he said, in a lowered voice. "Your question has awakened the memory of some singular words my uncle addressed to himself rather than to me. Lord Herndale must have been, as you suggest, in some trouble or scrape, for I remember meeting him as he came out of my uncle's room on the day of his departure from Algiers. I was going into the room, as I say, and Lord Herndale was coming out. I stood aside to let him pass, but I don't think he saw me. His head was bent, his face white and drawn; he looked as if he had just sustained a blow, a shock." Osborne gazed straight before him. "Yes, I can see him now quite distinctly. You are right, he was in trouble. I remember I went into the room. My uncle was sitting at his desk, with his hand before his eyes—"

Mr. Levison leant forward, his piercing black eyes fixed on Osborne's reflecting face. He looked like a man who was holding himself in leash, ready to spring at the psychological moment; but the tense attitude was only retained for a second or two, and as Osborne lowered his eyes and looked at him, the attitude relaxed and Mr. Levison was as impassive, as calm, and inscrutable as usual.

"My uncle turned as I entered," resumed Osborne, "and said—" He stopped and knocked the ash off his cigar. "I have my doubts, Mr. Levison, whether I ought to tell you."

Mr. Levison was too wise, too astute, to press the point. He sat quite still and silent. He knew that if Owen Osborne decided not to tell him, not to repeat the words, nothing he, Mr. Levison, could say would induce him to do so. He waited while the clock behind him ticked half a dozen times; then his astuteness had its reward. Osborne looked up with a jerk of the head, as if he had made up his mind.

"I have come to the conclusion, Mr. Levison, that as I have answered your questions thus far, it would be inconsistent to stop short. I do not

know why you want this information I am giving you; I have no particular reason for believing your assertion that the matter concerns me directly or indirectly; I do not know what purpose you are pursuing; but I may say that I am not in the habit of being made a dupe of, and that I should not take kindly to the role."

Mr. Levison did not quail or display any embarrassment. "The man who would attempt to make a dupe of you, Mr. Osborne, would be in need of my sympathy; he would certainly get my contempt," he said, as if he were stating an indisputable and commonplace fact.

"I'll tell you," said Osborne. "The words my uncle let drop were, as near as I can remember: 'There goes the most unhappy man in the world. A man with a broken heart. And I'm afraid I've helped to break it.'"

Mr. Levison's lips moved slightly, as if he were repeating the words. There was silence for a moment or two; then he said:

"Can you give me your uncle's address, Mr. Osborne?"

"Certainly," said Osborne. "He is living in a little place just outside St. Heliers in Jersey. He is a very old man now, and lives in complete retirement. I have not seen him for years, though we write to each other occasionally. He has quite withdrawn from the world; takes no interest in anything but his vineries and to-mato-houses."

"Very interesting, grape-growing," remarked Mr. Levison. "I have long wanted to see something of it. It is a pleasant trip to Jersey, especially at this time of the year—very."

He rose, buttoned his light overcoat, and reached for his hat. Osborne also rose. He was tired, worn out, and was not sorry his visitor was going.

"You intend crossing to Jersey to see my uncle?" he said. "In that case I do not think it is likely we shall meet again, Mr. Levison. I am starting for Africa immediately."

Levison raised his eyelids and looked at Osborne sharply. "I wouldn't do that if I were you, Mr. Osborne," he said.

"Why not?" demanded Osborne grimly.

Levison was silent for a moment; then he looked steadily at Osborne, and said:

"I thought that I had asked my last question, but I will ask one other, if I may venture to do so? Are you interested in the welfare of Miss Lyndhurst?"

The blood rose quickly to Osborne's face, then left it pale and drawn, and he looked at Levison sternly.

"Why do you ask?"

Mr. Levison nodded, as if Osborne had replied to the question.

"Because that lady is very greatly concerned in this matter," he said. "Good night."

Osborne was too astounded, too staggered, to attempt to stay him, and Levison passed out.

(To be Continued.)

Little Boy Had Eczema
On Face and Hands—Local Doctors Treated Him in Vain—How Cure Was Finally Effected.

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